ISSN 2073-5111(Print)

nature net

naturekenya.org

March 2020

Partnerships to restore Mt. Kenya forest

PHOTO: KRISTIN GATES

One of the community forest association tree nurseries in Mt. Kenya.

BY MARTIN NJOGU AND MILKA MUSYOKA

March 21 is the International Day of Forests – this year's theme being 'Forests and Biodiversity'. This day is marked to raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests. Nature Kenya and forest-adjacent communities are striving to restore the forest landscape on the iconic Mt. Kenya and other parts of Kenya.

Enhancing the capacity of communities to engage various stakeholders in forest conservation is key to ensuring the sustainability of forest landscape restoration initiatives. Eleven Community Forest Associations (CFAs) in Mt. Kenya, working closely with Nature Kenya, are among the recipients of Ksh32 million funding from Upper Tana Natural Resources Management Project to boost restoration of the Mt. Kenya forest.

The 11 CFAs are Gatere, Murinduko and Irangi from Murang'a, Kirinyaga and Embu counties respectively; Ruthumbi and Mweru from Meru county; Chuka and Kiera Hills from Tharaka Nithi county; and Cheche, Naromoru, Ragati and Hombe from Nyeri county.

The funding to the CFAs marks a milestone for the participatory forest management approach in Mt. Kenya, where community groups are now directly engaging public and private entities to finance their conservation activities. This follows a series of training programs undertaken by Nature Kenya to build the capacity of the CFAs. The groups have been trained on governance, advocacy, writing of business plans and funding proposals, among other subjects.

"The main aim of the training is to help the CFAs diversify their financial resource base to complement their forest restoration efforts," says Charles Kiama, Nature Kenya's Conservation Officer.

The funds will go towards supporting various sustainable livelihood projects like establishment of tree nurseries, eco-tourism and fish farming. These activities are aimed at improving livelihoods, creating employment and reducing poverty levels among forest adjacent communities through conservation, management and sustainable utilization of the forest resource.

Upper Tana Natural Resources Management Project, or Upper Tana Project as it is widely known, supports communities to sustainably manage natural resources. Besides providing funding, part of their mandate is to improve the incomes and the living standards of the target groups through interventions that are beneficial to the management of the natural resources. Last year, 22 CFAs from the Mt. Kenya block received their first Ksh20 million grant from the Upper Tana Project.

Nature Kenya, with funding from World Land Trust and The Darwin Initiative, is partnering with CFAs and other stakeholders to restore degraded sections of the Mt. Kenya forest. About 650,000 trees have been planted since 2017 covering close to 650 hectares of degraded forest area. Last year, 421,800 trees were planted during the heavy rains of October and November. The work of nurturing tree seedlings to maturity was done by members of 22 CFAs. Kiama says that they hope to capitalize on the long rains from March to May to double these numbers. To achieve this, Nature Kenya is partnering with five county governments – Meru, Nyeri, Embu, Tharaka-Nithi and Kirinyaga – and like-minded locally based community organizations, among them CFAs and Site Support Groups.

A business case has been developed for Mt. Kenya forest. The business case seeks to enhance the wellbeing of forest-adjacent communities by providing an incentive to conserve, manage and restore the Mt. Kenya ecosystem. The communities (water 'sellers') engage in protection and rehabilitation of the watershed, with financial support from downstream water users ('the buyers'). Kenya Breweries Limited adopted the business case in 2017 and has since facilitated the planting and nurturing of 100,000 seedlings in Mt Kenya.

"Our main target is large-scale water buyers and consumers of resources from Mt Kenya. We are supporting CFAs to partner with the stakeholders who are willing to engage in forest restoration activities," says Kiama.

Mt. Kenya forest is an irreplaceable biodiversity hotspot with unique flora and fauna of conservation importance, which underpins its Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) status and government protection. The forest is a cornerstone of Kenya's economy through provision of varied socio-economic and ecosystem services: Mt. Kenya forest is a major carbon sink and a major water tower.

110TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

VENUE
Louis Leakey Hall, Nairobi Museum

DATE — **TIME**
Wednesday 6th May 2020 — 11:30am - 2:00pm

AGENDA & PROGRAM

11:30am Conservation Forum/Exhibition
12:00pm Coffee/tea and quick lunch
1:00pm Convene in hall

- Minutes of the 109th AGM
- Matters arising from the Minutes
- Chairman's Report
- Honorary Treasurer's Report
- Appointment of Auditor
- Library, Journal, Committees and Projects Report
- Any other business of which due notice in the form of the Resolution to be proposed has been given to the Honorary Secretary, signed by not less than 2 members, not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting
- Election of Office Bearers, Members of the Executive Committee, and Trustees

2:30pm Film

Nomination forms for office bearers or Executive Committee members may be collected from the office or requested by e-mail.

Counting gains of participatory forest management

BY FRANCIS KAGEMA

For many years the government has experimented with various community-based forest conservation approaches. None of these approaches has stood the test of time like the Participatory Forest Management (PFM) model.

Participatory Forest Management deliberately involves forest-adjacent communities and other stakeholders in the management of forests within a structure that contributes to the communities' livelihoods. PFM has contributed to increased conservation awareness leading to better conservation of forests. It has also inculcated a sense of ownership among forest-adjacent communities who actively engage in forest conservation activities.

Communities living adjacent to forests are first required to register with the Registrar of Societies as Community Forest Associations (CFAs). The CFAs then enter into a collaborative management agreement with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) after presenting a Participatory Forest Management Plan. Once permission is granted by KFS to participate in the conservation and management of forest resources, CFAs are allowed to utilize certain forest resources through livelihood activities like butterfly farming, poultry farming, bee keeping, Aloe farming and sale of herbal medicine.

Participatory Forest Management was first piloted in Kenya in 1997 at Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, East Africa's largest and most intact coastal forest. The pilot area covered three villages: Dida, Kahingoni and Kafidsoni, located in the south-western part of the forest. These villages represented a small percentage of the entire forest adjacent communities which comprise of 52 villages.

The main aim of PFM is to engage communities in the management of forests by sharing with them benefits accrued from forest resources. For starters, unusual activities hardly go unnoticed in this iconic forest. The community members are vigilant and promptly relay information on any illegal activity to the concerned authorities. Also, trained community scouts conduct regular patrols within the forest. The scouts also undertake de-snaring exercises.

Site monitoring is another activity conducted by volunteers from the community. This includes biodiversity and common bird monitoring. Data collected from these citizen science-led initiatives is used to determine the status, threats and responses at the site. The communities also engage in forest restoration activities, that not only serve to protect the environment but also improve the livelihoods of people who are dependent on the forest.

On the livelihood front, nature-based enterprises such as butterfly farming and beekeeping are being promoted to reduce pressure on the forest for sustenance. Agro-forestry is also being adopted as a livelihood option with ecological as well as economic values. Community groups have established tree nursery and donated tens of thousands of seedlings for planting in the forest while also planting some in their individual farms.

Much as there is good news to write home about, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest still faces a myriad of threats ranging from illegal harvesting of forest products such as building poles to the poaching of wild animals. This is happening despite massive investment in awareness creation against such practices, promotion of alternative livelihoods and improved forest governance. High demand for illegally sourced forest products and perceived limited access to PFM gains are some of the reasons behind the destructive activities.

As we continue to celebrate the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest PFM milestones, there is a need to critically review the extent of its reach and benefits to the target population. As much as it has been demonstrated that communities derive ecosystem benefits from the forest, these benefits may not be obvious to all, or may not be deemed sufficient. Since Arabuko-Sokoke is a conservation forest, communities do not have the opportunity to grow crops around tree plantations, which is available under the Plantation Establishment and Livelihood Improvement Scheme (PELIS).

PFM in Arabuko-Sokoke could be more successful if more households were included. Forest adjacent communities also need to be encouraged to tap into unexploited opportunities, such as the presence of wildlife in the forest, to position Arabuko-Sokoke as a tourist attraction. This will broaden revenue streams for the communities as they engage in ecotourism ventures.

CONSERVATION NEWS

UNEXPECTED PINK VISITOR

There was excitement at Chaka Primary School in Nyeri County when a Lesser flamingo was spotted at the school's compound on February 4th. The flamingo appeared injured on its wing and leg. Curious pupils offered to help the bird by trying to give it some water. The school's administration alerted Mt. Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group (Mt.Kebio) of the incident. One member of the site support group visited the school and contacted the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). KWS later took the bird for treatment.

MORE VULTURE DEATHS

Seven vultures were reported dead in February following a poisoning incident in Maasai Mara. The vultures (two Lappet-faced, two White-backed and three Hooded) were found dead at the Olerai Conservancy. It is suspected that the birds had fed on a poisoned hyena carcass. This latest incident brings the total number of reported poisoning-related vultures deaths to 54 since August last year. A surviving White-backed vulture (pictured above) was taken to Olderkesi Conservancy for rehabilitation. Hooded and White-faced vultures are listed as Critically Endangered in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Lappet-faced vultures are listed as Endangered.

New Website Announcement

Succulenta EA has launched its own website which can be viewed on **www.succulentaea.org**
The website gives information about Succulenta East Africa, its activities and association with Nature Kenya, all accompanied by colour photographs of some of Kenya's amazing succulent plants. Previous newsletters can also be downloaded. Enquiries regarding Succulenta East Africa may be sent to **info@succulentaea.org**

STOP PRESS

There are plans to fence the southern boundary of the Nairobi National Park. Look out for updates in the media.

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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World Wetlands Day in Key Biodiversity Areas

BY ESTHER WANGARI

YALA SWAMP

World Wetlands Day was marked in Usalu Village, Siaya County, where the famous Osprey bird from Finland was rescued. The County Executive Committee in charge of Environment, Water and Natural Resources led other county government officials and members of the public in a tree planting exercise, planting indigenous trees donated by the Kenya Forest Service. Leaders present emphasised the importance of conserving the biodiversity of Yala Swamp which is threatened by human encroachment. They praised Nature Kenya and other stakeholders for facilitating the formulation of a Land Use Plan (LUP) and called for the fast tracking of its implementation as a key step towards securing the Yala Swamp ecosystem. Walter Tende, the man who rescued the ringed Osprey, was feted for bringing Usalu village to the world attention and marketing Siaya County as a tourist attraction.

TAITA HILLS

Pupils from Ngoila Primary School took part in a bird watching session in Kishenyi Dam to mark World Wetlands day. With the help of Dawida Biodiversity Conservation Group (DaBiCo), the 107 pupils got a chance to learn how to identify different water bird species. DaBiCo officials educated the children on the importance of wetlands and the threats that undermine their existence. The pupils were taught about the actions they need to take to promote sustainable utilization of wetlands.

SABAKI RIVER MOUTH

The day was marked with a nature walk along the Sabaki Estuary. Participants drawn from Sabaki River Conservation Development Organization, Malindi Marine Park and Kenya Wildlife Service

took time to monitor the status of mangrove forests in the area. They later converged at the Sabaki River mouth for a clean up exercise where 30Kg of plastic waste was collected. Since it was a school day, they proceeded to Majeni Primary School and Majeni Secondary School where the pupils and students were given conservation lessons focusing on the importance of conserving the Sabaki River mouth ecosystem.

TANA RIVER DELTA

The day was marked by an early morning bird watch. Later, participants engaged in a tree planting exercise where 200 trees were planted along the shores of Lake Shakababo in Garsen South, followed by speeches. Those who spoke recognized contributions made to conserve the Tana River Delta and pledged to support efforts in restoration of forest cover along the Kipao area, which was said to have been degraded. Nature Kenya's George Odera gave an update on the implementation of the Tana River Delta Land Use Plan whose scope stretches from Garsen to Kipini. He informed participants of the ongoing awareness creation campaign on formation of Village Natural Resource and Land Use Committees which will act as the custodians of resources at village level in Tana Delta.

Evening and morning bright planets

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

Brilliant Venus is in the western sky in the evening, setting at about 9:30pm. At month's end Venus is near the group of stars that the ancient Greeks called the Pleiades or Seven Sisters. With binoculars you can see many more stars and a glowing haze in the Pleiades. The waxing crescent moon is near Venus on March 28.

The other visible planets are in the morning sky before dawn. Bright Jupiter is high in the east. To the right of Jupiter, the constellation of the Scorpion is high in the south. The Scorpion's reddish star Antares is bright – the waning moon is near Antares on March 15.
The reddish planet Mars is to the east (left) and below Antares. Mars is faint at first, but growing brighter.

During March 2020, Jupiter and Saturn rise in the predawn sky and overtake Mars. At mid-month Jupiter and Mars appear close together; the waning moon is near them on March 18. The moon is near Saturn on the 19th, and Jupiter rises above Mars on March 20-21. The little planet Mercury is lower in the sky, near the moon on the 22nd. At month's end it's the turn of golden Saturn to approach Mars – now nearly as bright – passing it on April 1st.

March Stars

Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, is high in the south; below it is Canopus, the second brightest star. The star Procyon is high above, on the other side of Sirius.
North of Procyon, four bright stars form the corners of a long rectangle – the constellation of Gemini, the Twins. To the east of Gemini, the constellation of Leo the Lion is rising. Imagine its star Regulus as the lion's heart, and a half-circle of stars to the north as the lion's mane. The moon is near the star Pollux in Gemini on March 5 and near Regulus on the 8th.

The distinctive constellation of Orion, the Hunter or Warrior of the ancient Greeks, is high in the west: Three bright stars in a row, and around them, four stars like the corners of a box. As we went to press, the star Betelgeuse was still at Orion's shoulder; scientists say that the fading 'red supergiant' is beginning to brighten again.

The big pentagon of Auriga, the charioteer, with its bright star Capella, is in the northwest. The Pleiades cluster and the reddish star Aldebaran are between Orion and Auriga, dipping towards the west. The waxing moon is near Aldebaran on March 2.

Moon, March '20

The full moon of March 9 is called a "supermoon", as it's near the Earth on its orbit. It may look a little bigger and brighter than usual, and pull the tides a little lower and higher. March 2, first quarter ("half" moon overhead at sunset). March 16, last quarter ("half" moon overhead at dawn). March 24: new moon.

March Sun

On March 20 the sun crosses the equator, marking the equinox: the time of equal day and night, all over the world.

2020 LUNGS FOR KENYA CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT
Golf for Restoration of Mt. Kenya Forest
Friday 27th March 2020 | Karen Country Club | starting 8:00am
Lead Sponsor: Ksh. 1,000,000 - 3,000,000 (Includes 4 teams) Gold Sponsor: Ksh. 500,000 (Includes 3 teams) Silver Sponsor: Ksh. 250,000 (Includes 3 teams) Bronze Sponsor: Ksh. 100,000 (Includes 2 teams) Hole Sponsorship: Ksh. 50,000 (Includes 2 teams) FOUR BALL: Ksh 12,000
TO REGISTER CONTACT: 0739 200216 office@naturekenya.org

MARCH 2020 AT A GLIMPSE

Mar 4th	Morning Bird Walk/Public Talk
Mar 7th	FoNA Tree Walk
Mar 11th	Morning Bird Walk
Mar 14th	Hell's Gate Members Trip
Mar 15th	Sunday Bird Watch
Mar 18th	Morning Bird Walk
Mar 21st	FoCP Nature Walk
Mar 25th	Morning Bird Walk
Mar 30th	FoNA Tree Walk

Bird ringing every Tuesday morning (check with Ornithology section, National Museums).

Birders Please Note! The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Museum. Transport is on a self-help basis. The group meets in the courtyard of the Nairobi National Museum, past the entrance to the galleries. We normally return at about 12:30 pm.

The Sunday Birdwatch on the THIRD Sunday of each month now also meets at 8:30 am, at the same location. It is a day trip; please bring water and lunch.

Mombasa Birdwalks On the 3rd Saturday of each month. For meeting time and place, please contact Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540; or Doris Schaule <dorischaule@gmail.com> / 0722-277752. Or check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Ngong Forest walks - 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 am. Contact Simon 0729-840715

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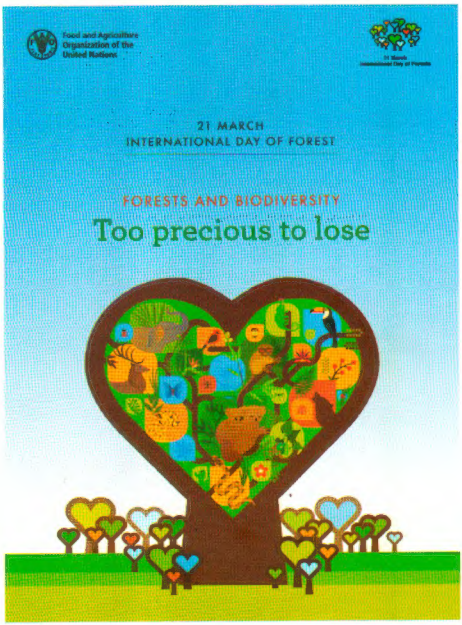

Hell's Gate National Park Day Excursion

14th March 2020

Book & pay by 6th March 2020.
Contact: Tel. 0780149200 or news@naturekenya.org

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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org